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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

TOWARDS A DESCRIPTIVE MODEL OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE MODERN NOVEL

BY

© VIRGINIA LORI DURKSEN HENNING

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1986

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Towards a Descriptive Model of Christianity in the Modern Novel* submitted by Virginia Lori Durksen Henning in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

P.L. Knight
(Supervisor)

Date: October 10, 1986

ABSTRACT

The study of religion and literature, if done from a literary perspective, will benefit from the concepts suggested by formal and reader-oriented approaches to literature. As a first step towards defining the formal or stylistic means by which religious ideas enter literature, it is hypothesized that certain textual features are employed in the modern novel to represent the religious experience of Christianity.

Three features of twentieth-century "Christian" novels examined provide a model for the structure of religious experience in the novel. Firstly, typological features, which refer to the sacred texts and institutions of Christianity, introduce a specific religious context in which to understand the novel. Secondly, against this background of ideas, the novel's protagonist struggles to establish a relationship with God through some form of "I-Thou" communication. Finally, in the tension which arises between these religious ideas and the experience of them, the reader is made aware of the process of interpretation and is invited to recognize an extra horizon of significance which points to his or her own experience. This model may provide the reader with a means of distinguishing the decorative from the significant use of Christian features, as well as providing a point of reference from which to study problematic or ambiguous representations of Christianity in the modern novel.

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A thesis never really belongs to just one person. I owe a great deal to Professor Philip Knight - for his never-failing encouragement and for his graduate seminar in which I was able to organize my thought and reading on the vast area of religious-literary criticism. The "model" which I have explored in this thesis was developed through our discussion of various literary approaches to religion in literature.

The comments of my fellow students in Professor Knight's course, "Christian Literary Forms and Language," also served to enrich my own study of the representation of Christianity in the modern novel.

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I. INTRODUCTION: CONTEXTS

It is with reservations that I refer to "literature" and "religion" together in the same thesis. There is a powerful hyphen at work between these two disciplines, a hyphen that expands the potential realm of discussion to impossible, dare I say infinite, proportions. Even when this hyphen is hidden or unacknowledged, it continues to draw literature and religion together under the broad umbrella of symbolic uses of language. Throughout the history of Western culture, the symbolic function of language has served as the basis of the dialectical relationship between religion and literature. In content, form, style and even in social function, religion and literature have variously overlapped and subsumed one another within the broader contexts of linguistic and cultural experience.

The problems inherent to the interdisciplinary study of literature and religion arise from the fact that it is difficult to draw a clear line of distinction between the proper realms of each discipline. The most obvious common denominator between religion and literature is that both use language in a manner different from other disciplines - a manner best characterized as metaphoric or symbolic. Central to both disciplines is the study of a text or texts; even the type of reading invited by these texts is similar. Perhaps most significant is the fact

that the content of both literature and religion may encompass the full range of human experiences and thoughts. Although the line of distinction between literature and religion (as disciplines and as aspects of human experience) is drawn only with the knowledge that it cannot be drawn completely and finally, some constraints are necessary to prevent the scholarly study of religion and literature from losing itself within the broad realm of the metaphysical.

This thesis, however, is not intended to be an interdisciplinary study of religion and literature. Rather it is an attempt to describe the means by which a *particular* religion - Christianity - is introduced as a significant aspect of human experience within a *particular* genre - the modern novel. Students of psychology know that in order for readers to recognize within a novel the presence of "Freudian" or "Jungian" psychology specific features must be present; one approach may be distinguished from the other by the presence or absence of these key features. The same is true, I would suggest, for our ability to distinguish between the portrayal of Judaic, Islamic or Christian, anti-theist, pantheist or monotheist, religious experience. The history, the ideas and the details of fact which inform each of these belief systems differ widely. Christianity, as Erich Auerbach has pointed out so clearly in his essay entitled "Figura," has had from its origins a habit of appropriating to itself the history and the sacred texts of other

traditions, most notably Hebrew scriptures and history (*Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* 49-60). It would seem that this habit of reading one's own meaning from the texts of another tradition has also been employed by some religion-oriented literary critics who attempt to discover Christian values or significance in literature with little regard for whether individual texts invite such readings.

The approach which suggests that the meaning of all human experience is ultimately Christian or religious in some way is one extreme position. Another extreme might be to distill Christianity as a religion into such a specific essence that only one particular denominational stance is admitted as the true faith. The distinctive features by which we may describe and identify the religious aspects of a novel as specifically Christian must be recognizably Christian, yet sufficiently flexible to accommodate the variety of denominational factors within Christianity. Like the author who incorporates Freudian psychology into a novel, the writer of "Christian" novels must also be working from some prototype or model of Christianity. Therefore, certain essentially Christian features should be consistently present within those novels which appear to be "Christian" in content or theme.

In this initial attempt to describe systematically the features of Christianity employed within the modern novel, a sample of representative texts was chosen from among English, French and

Canadian novels of the twentieth century (a list of these novels is attached in Appendix A). These novels were chosen on the basis of the fact that they represent either a Catholic or a Protestant tradition in their references to Christian institutions. They are primarily concerned with the religious aspect of human experience, although that experience may be presented ambiguously and in relation to various aspects of human experience - such as psychology, cultural traditions or romantic love.

It is my hypothesis that three features represent the minimal means by which Christianity is represented in the modern novel; these features will be presented later in greater detail and with illustrations taken from the texts examined. Experimental and speculative in approach, this thesis is intended to be a first step towards more fully defining the means by which religious ideas enter literature. Areas in which this hypothesis may be tested further will be suggested in my concluding remarks.

What, then, are the features which assist the reader in identifying instances in which a "Christian" reading of the text is indeed valid? The first, and most obvious feature by which Christianity is introduced into the modern novel, is the use of Christian or "typological" language. By this I mean language which is recognizable as being taken from the Old and New Testaments, or from the institutional context of the Church in

its various denominations. If, however, only Old Testament references are given, with no further evidence of the presence of Christian elements, then a case might be made for understanding the religious elements of that particular text within the Judaic religious context. If we find references to a God coupled with references to the spiritual forces within animals, trees and rocks, we might understand the religious system to be animist and not exclusively Christian. There must be unambiguous reference to specifically Christian scriptures or traditions for typological features to be considered present in a text.

Typological features are necessary, but are not by themselves sufficient reason for understanding a novel as containing some representation of Christian experience. The language and customs of Christianity provide a background set of ideas, but the novel is an anthropocentric form, one that treats the individual's experience as both an internal adventure of self-discovery and an external pattern of relationships within society. The emphasis of Christianity as a belief system is on the interior yet exterior relationship which must be established between the individual and God. This relationship, which I will call the "I-Thou" feature, is established through some form of address to God, a God who has already been clearly identified as the "Christian" God by the novel's use of Christian typological langauge.

The third feature by which we may identify the presence of

Christian religious expression within the novel, is really a by-product of the first two. Against the background text of Christian ideas introduced through the use of typological features, the protagonist's struggle to establish an "I-Thou" relationship is portrayed as an adventure in which the individual must learn to correctly interpret the text of his or her experience according to the norms and values of Christianity. The "good" interpretation may or may not be the one condoned by Christian tradition or by the church as institution; it is primarily linked with the interior thought and motivation of the character whose "I-Thou" relationship with God provides the focal point of individual religious experience in the novel. Other characters in the novel may judge the protagonist by outward appearances, but we, the readers, are given some clues as to the inner religious adventure of the protagonist. Through the process of reading the protagonist's struggle to understand the meaning of individual religious experience within a Christian context, the reader of the novel is led to extend his or her understanding of the novel beyond the immediate act of reading. Thus, the reader's experience is also placed within a Christian context, and may be measured against the struggle for correct interpretation portrayed within the novel. Of course we know that individual readers are free to agree or argue with the religious perspective suggested by the novel, just as we are free to agree or disagree with Freudian psychology. For this feature I have

chosen the term "hermeneutic prospective" - "hermeneutic" because it is linked with the act of interpretation and "prospective" in that it combines the Christian *perspective* introduced by the typological features with an appeal to the reader to extend the religious experience of the novel beyond the immediate act of reading into the future experience of the reader him- or herself.

These three features suggest a form or model that is characteristic of the represention of Christian experience within the modern novel. By "model" I mean, in simple Oxford English Dictionary terms, the "design, style of structure" (650). Although this model is an abstract form, for clarity it may be represented as a simplified two-dimensional image, in which each of the three features is necessary to complete the design (Fig. 1. p. 9). Because the novel is essentially human-centred (not to mention the fact that a religious experience needs an experiencing individual), the protagonist is placed at the very centre of the religious experience in the text.

Insofar as these three features of Christian experience are manifested within the modern novel as features of its form or language, the model proposed may also be considered a model for the description of the formal or stylistic features of what might be called a "Christian novel." In addition to being a descriptive tool, it might serve a further purpose as a model for reading, as a tool for identifying which modern

novels might, or should be read as Christian, and in what ways. Thus, although the model is proposed here as a hypothetical construct, it is not unambitious in its descriptive and hermeneutical scope.

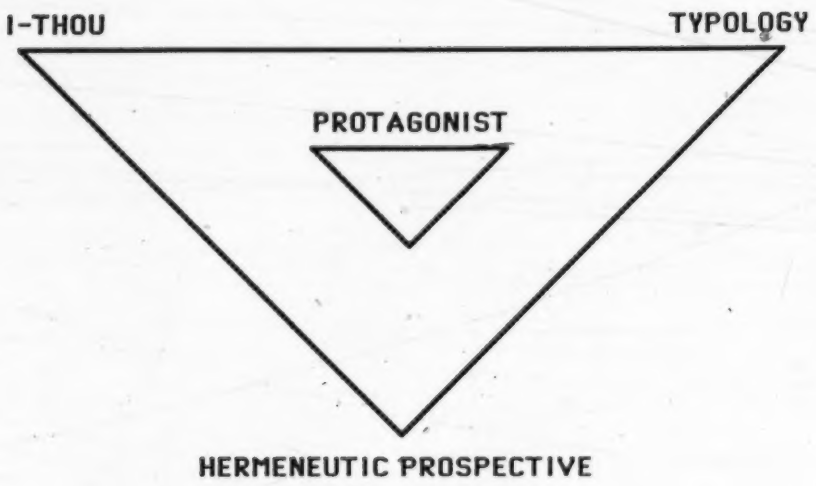

Fig. 1. A Model of Christian Features in the Modern Novel

A. The Scholarly Context

Before examining the scholarly and literary contexts in which this model must be seen to function, it might be helpful to trace briefly the impetus behind my attempts to describe the relationship between the form of the modern novel and Christianity as a specific set of religious ideas and experiences. Originally I had intended to examine the phenomenon of religious conversion in novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In an attempt to study religious conversion *not* as a theme, but rather as a part of the formal structure of novels, I began to look through "the literature" on the study of religion *in* literature. Within this scholarship, virtually nothing has been done to examine the formal features by which religion is introduced into the novel.

The scholarship does include thematic studies of individual texts that reach a high level of interpretive virtuosity (William Empson's *Milton's God* , for example), as well as works which deal with the mythical archetypes which lie behind both religion and literature (Northrop Frye's *The Great Code*). Between the very general and the very specific study, where I hoped to find a description of formal aspects whic might be applied to specific texts, there is a void in the scholarship. In order to understand the formal role of religious conversions in the novel, I felt the need for a formal framework within

which to describe how religious features in general function in the novel.

In reading through the novels which served as the test cases for the development of such a framework, I discovered that there are certain features which all of these texts employ in their representation of Christianity. These features form the basis of a model that might help us, first, to identify texts which contain a Christian perspective. If the proposed model is a normative minimum for the representation of Christianity in the novel, then it may also function as a measuring stick against which to understand problematic or ambiguous representations of Christianity. The absence of any one of these features might account for some uncertainty as to whether the religious aspects of the novel may be interpreted as being Christian. Finally, a model of Christian expression in the modern novel might suggest new ways of looking at Christian expression in other genres such as poetry.

In order to establish the scholarly context within which this model is being proposed, it is necessary to look at examples of the two broad approaches taken by scholars within the interdisciplinary study of religion and literature. In this area of scholarship the religious and literary viewpoints are as varied as the types of literature taken to have religious meaning - even James Bond can be read as a Christ figure if one has an overdeveloped knack for typological interpretation. In addition to the individual text vs. archetypal system distinctions which I have

already mentioned, another distinction might be made between a religious and a literary approach to the topic. In order to illustrate this important distinction, I will look at two examples of texts which claim a religious orientation and use literature as a means for discussing religion. Following that, a discussion of Northrop Frye's *The Great Code* will illustrate the type of text which intends to be literary in approach but ends up in the realm of theology. Finally, Robert Alter's literary study of Biblical texts is given as an example of a work which has a literary orientation, even though it is describing a religious text.

The conclusions of a work of literary scholarship depend to a large extent upon the premises with which the scholar begins. In order to talk about any aspect of human experience, some organizing framework or point of view must be adopted; this adoption of a critical stance is an accepted and integral part of the machinery of literary studies. In an interdisciplinary study, too, we assume that the author has developed some notions that "religion is or is not like this," and "literature is or is not like that," before she or he attempts to compare the two. However, our understanding of what is said within interdisciplinary studies requires not only an awareness of the author's metaphysical and literary presuppositions, but also a clear notion of the *scholarly* focus (or bias) of the author. Far more important than whether an author is a Catholic or an atheist is the question of whether the work is primarily one of

literary scholarship or one of religious scholarship. The literary and the religious biases characterize two general types of approach to the interdisciplinary study of literature.

In addition to statements of religious bias, prefaces to works of religious-literary criticism also frequently contain an acknowledgment of the importance of maintaining a clear distinction between literary and religious endeavors. In the introductory chapter of *Imagination and the Life of the Spirit*, for example, Lynn Ross-Bryant makes a clear statement of her understanding of the common ground and distinctions between the two disciplines:

> This study of the relationship between religion and literature presupposes that literature is an important revealer of religious dimensions of a culture and that by taking account of the religious dimension of experience our understanding of a work of literature will be deepened. This understanding assumes that religion and literature are two different things, and to confuse them would do an injustice to both. (3)

Literature, she goes on to say, is not to be read as theology, or "judged by the standards of truth or logical organization appropriate to theology" (3). Ross-Bryant has a clear idea of the kind of line that must be drawn between the two disciplines, and further statements in her introductory chapter also serve to indicate that her *primary* scholarly concern is with religious questions: "Through close attention to particular works of literature and to theological insights we will hope to understand more about religious dimensions of a culture" (3). This is the key to

Ross-Bryant's literary criticism: it is written from a religious perspective. A student of literature may obtain helpful insights into individual literary texts in the course of reading Ross-Bryant's work, but this will be a by-product of the work's primary purpose. The author's scholarly intentions are clearly stated, and the reader who proceeds with these in mind will not fall into the trap of expecting the work to achieve something it was not intended to do.

John Coulson's *Religion and Imagination: In Aid of a Grammar of Assent* explores the similarities between religious faith and imaginative assent. Coulson, like Ross-Bryant, makes some clear statements of his scholarly intentions. It is his thesis that "in the articulation of this assent the theologian and the literary critic share . . . a common grammar, if by grammar is understood that underlying form or structure which is revealed as we learn and use a language" (145). This common grammar is of course linked to the use of metaphor, symbol and story as a means of expression in both literature and religion. Coulson's book is intended "to show what the student and teacher of *religion* may gain from cultivating a properly imaginative response to literature" (v, emphasis added). Although he also makes some insightful observations about religious themes in nineteenth and twentieth-century English literature, the focus of his argument is on imagination as a religious tool.

Such clear statements of scholarly focus are not always made or adhered to, even by respected scholars. When, as in the case of Northrop Frye's *The Great Code,* it becomes obvious that a work of religious-literary criticism is at cross-purposes with the author's stated intentions, the response within the literary community is often one of disappointment and vague suspicion. Four reviewers in *The University of Toronto Quarterly* differ widely in their analysis of Frye's work, yet on one opinion they are agreed - Frye's scholarly focus is not entirely or consistently literary. "One cannot read the final pages of *The Great Code* without the feeling of a doctrine emerging from the exposition," writes Louis Dudek (133). David Jeffrey suggests that "if it were not for the subtitle, one might take *The Great Code* to be a treatise in hermeneutical theology compatible with the work of theorists such as Hegel, Derrida, and Kenneth Burke" (135). Add to this Emero Stiegman's statement that "Frye is not innocent of theology " (143) and George Woodcock's that "*The Great Code* is indissolubly linked with Frye's religious background" (150), and the picture is complete.

In attempting to tackle a "survey of Biblical imagery and narrative, followed by some explanation of how these elements of the Bible had set up an imaginative framework," Frye first addressed himself to "certain preliminary questions, which I thought would be confined within an introductory chapter or two" (*The Great Code* xi). These preliminary

questions "expanded, first into an enormous Hegelian preface, and finally into a volume in its own right" (*The Great Code* xi). Clearly the questions preliminary to talking about sacred and secular texts in one breath are not insignificant, even for Northrop Frye. In spite of Frye's disclaimer - "The present book is not a work of Biblical scholarship, much less of theology: it expresses only my own personal encounter with the Bible, and at no point does it speak with the authority of a scholarly consensus" (xi) - *The Great Code* is more than one man's personal experience of the Bible. It is at the very least the opinion of a great literary scholar and, as Frye goes on to explain, the impetus for the work is linked with his endeavors as a teacher of literature.

Frye rightly points out that he is not writing a book on the Bible as literature (the subtitle is *The Bible and Literature*). It would, however, be accurate to say that he is asking us to see literature as coterminous with the Bible as a revelation of universal human archetypes. *The Great Code* is thus not only the work of a great teacher of literature, but also that of a self-styled theologian. Read for its insights into the nature of human religious expression, it might be fruitful or not depending upon whether the reader is willing to accept the premise that all texts, sacred and secular, spring from the archetypal impulses that Frye describes. If the reader is able to look beyond the work's metaphysical demands, he may be rewarded by useful insights into individual literary

texts and into the nature of metaphorical language.

In contrast with Frye's work, Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative* manages to avoid the temptation to develop a theology of literature. Although Alter's study is limited to the study of Biblical narrative, it also makes a practical contribution to literary theory. As the author points out in the preface, his initial goal of throwing "some new light on the Bible by bringing a literary perspective to bear on it," led eventually to the further understanding "that the Bible on its part has a great deal to teach anyone interested in narrative because its seemingly simple, wonderfully complex art offers such splendid illustrations of the primary possibilities of narrative" (ix-x). While examining the Bible from the perspective of the literary critic, Alter contributes much to our practical understanding of the nature of literary narrative. In doing so, he manages to avoid the two extremes that, in his opinion, characterize "literary studies at large,"

> . . . one [extreme] involving the elaboration of formal systems of poetics that have only a hypothetical relation to any individual literary work, the other dedicated to performing on the given text virtuoso exercises of interpretation which are in principle inimitable and unrepeatable, aimed as they are at undermining the very notion that the text might have any stable meanings. (178)

Alter's exploration of the primary possiblities of Biblical narrative may further our understanding of the ways in which Biblical literature functions. His study of the techniques of Biblical narrative highlights

four features which in some way resemble the features of Christianity employed in the modern novel.

In his conclusion Alter suggests that four rubrics might describe the distinctive features employed by the authors of the Old Testament stories: 1) Words - "The repetition of single words or brief phrases often exhibits a frequency, a saliency, and a thematic significance quite unlike what we may be accustomed to from other narrative traditions" (179); 2) Actions - "Recurrence, parallels, analogy are the hallmarks of reported action in the biblical tale" (180); 3) Dialogue - "Everything in the world of biblical narrative ultimately gravitates toward dialogue . . . the transitions from narration to dialogue provide in themselves some implicit measure of what is deemed essential" (182); and 4) Narration - "the very mode of narration conveys a double sense of a total coherent knowledge available to God . . . and the necessary incompleteness of human knowledge, for which much about character, motive, and moral status will remain shrouded in ambiguity" (184). These four features of Biblical narrative bear some general resemblance to the features in our model. The Christian typological features repeat Biblical *words* or *actions*. The "I-Thou" *dialogue* is the focal religious event of those novels, and the mode of *narration* points to the additional hermeneutical horizon to be recognized by the reader.

Alter's work also stresses the formal or technical aspects of

narrative. It might be argued, as Vernon Ruland does in *Horizons of Criticism* , a comprehensive survey of religious-literary criticism, that the purely formal approach does not recognize the role of religious impulses within literature. Ruland's survey covers the full range of literary criticism as it relates to religious-literary questions, and the four categories which he employs to characterize critical approaches may be useful in providing an orientation for my own approach.

> The *autotelist* surface occurs at the outside rim of concentric circles around the literary text, an area farthest isolated from the implicit religious values emphasized in my own inclusive theory of criticism, and nearest to the resident aesthetic values. Deeper successsively is the circle of *humanist semiotic* criticism, next the *ortho-cultural*, and closest to the metaphysic or religious dynamic of the work, a circle of *psycho-mythic* criticism. (64)

Ruland recognizes the limits of his spatial metaphor of concentric circles, "because one could also argue for a reverse sequence, mapping the autotelist layer closest to the formalistic heart of the text, and the psycho-mythic most inclusively open to the space outside the perimeter" (64). This is, in fact, what I have already argued by suggesting that "psycho-mythic" criticism of literary texts often tells us more about the theology of the critic than it does about the nature of the literary text. However, Ruland's first two types of approach, which might be renamed "formal" and "reader-oriented", suggest the means by which we might look at the literary heart of the text while still

considering the role of religious expression within the text.

In its most extreme form, autotelic criticism employs what Ruland calls the "autotelic fallacy," in which "the literary work is cut adrift from the consciousness of both author and critic, between whom the work is not a medium of communication but simple a third entity" (56). In a very simplistic summary of Russian formalism, Ruland paraphrases René Wellek in order to illustrate the limits of autotelic criticism: "Wellek reluctantly permits interdisciplinary studies of the literary text, but only if literary criticism itself remains strictly literary and does not slide into philosophy or theology" (69); Wellek shows a "partisan reluctance to support the submerged religious impulse struggling for expression in Eliot's literary criticism" (70).

Wellek does not deny the importance of exploring the role of ideas within literary texts; he does, however, insist that the scholarly focus of the literary critic should remain on the literary text itself.

> Instead of speculating on such large-scale problems as the philosophy of history and the ultimate integral of civilization, the literary student should turn his attention to the concrete problem not yet solved or even adequately discussed: the question of how ideas actually enter into literature. . . . The question arises only when and if these ideas are actually incorporated into the very texture of the work of art, when they become 'constitutive,' in short when they cease to be ideas in the ordinary sense of concepts and become symbols, or even myths. (122)

Wellek's emphasis is on literature's transformation (or transmutation) of

ideas into symbols or myths.

Equally interesting, however, is the question of how ideas enter literature when the symbols no longer live for a culture. In the modern context a journey is not necessarily a Christian pilgrimage, and a cross in the road need not be a Christian symbol. In order for a modern novel to invite a reading which is related to a particular belief system such as Christianity, the use of symbols must also be accompanied with the suggestion of a hermeneutic code by which to interpret those symbols. Wellek's concern for how ideas enter literature may be extended into the dynamic structuralism of polysystems theory, to ask how norms within the literary system (social and literary norms) shape the ways in which ideas are presented. On the textual level, narrative theory also suggests some interesting ways in which to understand the character and role of "God" in the novel.

As polysystems theory also recognizes, there is a broader human and cultural context which shapes and informs ideas. This type of approach is concerned with not only texts, but also the context in which writers and readers function. According to Ruland, for the "humanist semiotic" type of critic

> . . . the literary work is essentially a semiotic unit of discourse, with an emphatic but relational autonomy. It is organically interrelated with the wider human tradition of literature, and with the functionally religious experience of both the poet and his public. . . . the critic must draw upon all

> his own resources as a human being, and upon semantics, the social sciences, and all available specialized knowledge to gain full understanding of the text itself. Then he must analyze his experience and articulate it. (71)

Within this category of criticism Ruland places rhetorical criticism, "with its emphasis on the verbal texture and dynamics in a literary work" (71), and the phenomenological approach which attempts "to reclaim the detached aesthetic object within the matrix of man's unconscious life and the broader circle of his cultural tradition" (80). Underlying both approaches is a recognition of the role of human consciousness in the experience and articulation of the literary symbol, as well as a concern with "the total internal biology of a work" (72). Twenty years later, we might broaden this category to include the reader-response critics who recognize the active role of the reader in constructing the aesthetic object within the framework of his own experience. The introduction of a religious horizon within the literary text causes the reader to experience and interpret narrative within a broader context that makes very particular demands, as I hope to demonstrate within the framework of my model.

The final two types of criticism discussed by Ruland are representative of approaches which are beyond the scope of this present study. The "ortho-cultural" critic is one who examines the broader historical and political context of literature within the history of ideas or, in Lionel Trilling's words (as quoted by Ruland), within "'a people's

technology, its manners and customs, its religious beliefs and organizations, its systems of valuation, whether expressed or implicit'" (84). "Psycho-mythic" criticism "draws upon the contributory sciences of psychology and anthropology to explore [the] inner individual-social meaning in a literary work" (106). Although Ruland argues that these approaches draw nearer to the metaphysical heart of the text, they do so at the cost of ignoring literary forms and the type of responses that specific forms elicit through the process of reading. Having used Ruland's descriptions of the variety of approaches to religious-literary criticism, we may still head in the opposite direction from the one he recommends, and examine the formal features of Christianity in the modern novel.

In summary, this model is not intended to explore the history of ideas and religious beliefs, nor is it designed to describe some larger psycho-mythic context for literature. There are admittedly many complex relations between the poetic and the religious aspects of the human spirit, relations which touch on the metaphoric and the imaginative aspects of human expression. These complex relations are also not the subject of my thesis. My concern is with a particular formal configuration which may be observed in the modern novel, a configuration which is designed to lead the reader to a particular kind of knowledge and a particular type of response to his or her experience of the text.

B. The Literary Context

It is not difficult to identify a variety of genres or forms which have been clearly used to carry religious content: epic, confessional writing, devotional literature, hymns and sermons provide numerous examples of great literature that is also recognizably Christian. Some of these forms, the hymn and the sermon for example, are almost entirely defined by their Christian content and context, whereas poetry and the novel do not follow such clear distinctions between religious and secular content or intent. The use of the term "Christian novel" immediately suggests some difficulty in definition. In addition to the purely "decorative" or coincidental presence of "Christian" practises or language in the novel, Christian ideas or experiences may be presented in a positive, affirming light (either due to the author's personal faith or due to social conventions), or it may be presented in a negative, critical light (either with the intent of improving the institution or in an attempt to overthrow it). It would be a mistake to label all these uses of Christianity as "Christian literature;" in fact such a label may be spurious at worst and problematic at best.

It is, however, safe to say that there are modern novels that affirm the possibility of religious experience within the Christian framework either by affirming that faith or by criticizing it with the apparent intention of improving it. Such a definition leaves itself wide open to

criticism from two fronts - a work may be so positive towards Christianity as to be no longer a novel but rather a missionary tract, or it may be so negative that it would only be accepted as "Christian" by a very limited audience. However, even within the secular literature of the modern, post-Christian culture, there are texts which comfortably fit this category of novel. The common features of these texts provide the basis for a model which represents generally how the portrayal of Christianity influences the form of the novel.

The choice of the modern novel as the literary context within which to develop a framework for religious expression suggests its own set of demands and limitations. Even though scholars do not agree on the precise origins and nature of the novel - Marthe Robert calls it an "undefined genre" - there is general agreement that the novel is primarily a vehicle for secular concerns rather than for sacred themes and ideas. As Robert points out in *The Origins of the Novel*, the novel is a form with few boundaries: "it can exploit to its own ends description, narrative, drama, the essay, commentary, monologue and conversation . . . . There are no proscriptions or restrictions to limit its choice of subject matter, setting, time or space" (5). This freedom to present and comment upon any subject includes the exploration of religious ideas and experiences in the novel. The genre and subject matter are not inappropriate to one another. The novel is, however, a pluralistic form,

and its strength is found in the variety of styles and content that may be employed in one text. Thus, the Christian component might be a dominant element, but it is usually one among several aspects of human experience portrayed by the novel.

What type of vehicle does this primarily secular form provide for the presentation of religious content? George Lukács, in *The Theory of the Novel*, draws a contrast between the philosophical climate that produces the *epic* , which "gives form to a totality of life that is rounded from within" (60), and that which produces the *novel* , the product of "an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem" (56). Lukács argues that whereas the epic was the appropriate form for a unified theological perspective, the novel is the embodiment of pluralistic and problematic vision. Thus, while "the epic individual owed his significance to the grace accorded him, not to his pure individuality," it is the biography of the individual character that provides the inner form of the novel (80-83). The novel finds its proper balance not in unity, but in irony and self-correction (84). If art, in our current perception of it, "has nothing more to do with any world of forms that is immanently complete in itself" (17), then the portrayal of religious experience in the novel will also be a part of this struggle for balance within a problematic and pluralistic world view.

Although Lukács's description of the novel relies heavily upon its essential difference from the epic, the novel/epic distinction is blurred by other critics who point to the underlying fabric of language as the source of plurality. "Language," writes M. M. Bakhtin, ". . . is never unitary" (288).

> Literary language - both spoken and written - although it is unitary not only in its shared, abstract, linguistic markers but also in its form for conceptualizing these abstract markers, is itself stratified and heteroglot in its apsect as an expressive system, that is, in the forms that carry its meanings. (288)

The novelist "welcomes the heteroglossia and language diversity of the literary and extraliterary language into his own work not only not weakening them but even intensifying them (for he interacts with their particular self-consciousness)" (298).

We frequently identify this novelistic awareness of the dialectic possibilities of language with modernism, and in its most playful manifestation, with post-modernism. If, as Marthe Robert puts it, "modernity is understood as the self-searching, self-questioning literary movement which uses as subject matter its own doubt and belief in the value of its message" (19), then perhaps the novel has been, from its very inception, a prototype for modernism. Indeed, Robert cites *Don Quixote* as the first novel of this "modern" self-questioning type. It is evident that Christian theology no longer supplies the primary content nor

influences the forms of literature; the primary influence on content and form is this novel/modern concern with the possibilities and problems of language. The modern Christian novel might then seem to be a contradiction in terms; its form must be dictated by the need to accommodate both Christianity and the pluralistic, self-questioning character of the novel.

A second challenge facing the novelist of Christian ideas is the integration of the world of ideas with the internal life of an individual human character. The novel, I would argue, is uniquely equipped to explore both the individual and the theological aspects of religious experience. It "tells of the adventure of interiority, . . . the story of the soul that goes to find itself" (Lukács, 89), as well as having its "immediate roots in the true world of ideas" (Lukács,105). Although Frye argues that "interest in ideas and theoretical statements is alien to the genius of the novel proper, where the technical problem is to dissolve all theory into personal relationships" (*The Anatomy of Criticism* 308), Mary McCarthy finds ideas to be "intrinsic to the novelistic medium" (18). Frye suggests that the confessional novel is a form resorted to by "the novelist who cannot get along without ideas, or has not the patience to digest them in the way that James did" (*The Anatomy of Criticism* 308). By contrast "the novel proper" is inherently "extroverted and personal; its chief interest is in human character as it

manifests itself in society" (*The Anatomy of Criticism* 308), and not in the realm of ideas.

The implication of Frye's comments is that the confessional novel is a kind of second-rate or insufficient novel. It is not necessary to agree with Frye's hierarchy of literary value to see that the confessional or journal novel is a form that allows the novelist to explore the relationship between an individual and a certain set of ideas. H. Porter Abbott's *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action* suggests that diary fiction uses the self-reflection of the narrator/character to close

> . . . the gap between the creative and the critical. It is a drama of both writing and reading. Insofar as reading is a part of this drama, the text puts a light on the whole field of interpretation. . . . By joining writing and action, the reflexive diary . . . exposes a drama of interpretation blended or fused with a drama of creation. (49)

Thus diary fiction combines the interior adventure with the exterior by leading the diarist into a transforming perception of himself. This reflexive strategy is most evident in the confessional or diary form, but is also employed in first- or third-person narratives where the memory or point of view of a character plays a role in the transformative function of self-reflection.

If our definition of Christianity is limited to a commonly-believed transcendent vision of truth, then the epic is perhaps the best form in which to present a definitive and coherent theological system. However,

another aspect of religion that must be considered is the individual search for spiritual fulfillment and the social context of that search. The novel is fully equipped to portray the complex and often problematic nature of individual religious experience, as well as to explore the individual's relationship to God and society within a particular belief system.

Wolfgang Iser, in *The Implied Reader*, draws on Lukács's description of the epic character as a stock figure without a soul and the novelistic character as the individual moving towards self-recognition, to demonstrate how Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* combines the epic and the novel in a hybrid form ideally suited to the theological climate of his time. Bunyan's characters "cease to act as mouthpieces for a specific dogma and leave the realm of the epic" (6), because they are more concerned with their quest for individual salvation. The Christian idea of salvation is no longer presented as dogma, but serves as "a means of illuminating human reality and not [as] . . . an end in itself" (7). The pilgrim Christian's human reality is to some extent determined by the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, which allows him to achieve only a tentative sense of salvation, yet this "theological withholding of certitude stimulates human self-assertion, the development of which foreshadows the pattern of the eighteenth-century novel" (24). This journey towards self-discovery not only becomes an important feature of

the modern secular novel, but continues to play an important role as well in the presentation of specifically religious experience.

The novel may depict both the interior adventure of a character in search of self-knowledge and the external adventure by which characters establish relationships with each other. The mechanisms by which an individual character establishes a relationship with the character named God are a unique hybrid of the internal and the external. It is often through a character's search for self-knowledge that some understanding of his or her relationship with God is gained. This process is most evident when the novel is narrated by an individual who in old age is reviewing his or her past, either through memory flashbacks or the writing of a journal or final letter of confession. The character's attempt to understand and order the past in the immediate context of his or her concern about death and eternal destiny is an interior adventure that frequently takes place within the framework of a particular type of Christian dogma or institution. When the question of an individual relationship with God is set against a background of accepted church dogma, the problematic dialogue between the individual and social faces of religious experience is introduced.

In addition to the internal dialogue of the novel there is, as Iser points out, a dialectical relationship between the reader and the text. It is the reader's task to experience the meaning of the text through

discovery. In the modern novel an even greater burden is placed on the reader. The novelist refrains "from explicitly telling him what to do," to the point where the reader is provoked "into establishing for himself the connections between perception and thought" (xiii-xiv). This open-ended quality challenges the reader to discover those points at which the meaning of an event or a word extends into the world of his experience. The meaning of the novel is not some ideal entity to be extracted from the text but is instead something to be experienced in the process of reading.

Finally, in describing the context in which we read the modern "Christian" novel, emphasis should also be placed on the intellectual climate that produces modern literature in general. In this post-Christian and pluralistic era a world view informed by Christianity may not be assumed to be part of the cultural background of either the actual or the ideal reader. To borrow a term used by Umberto Eco, Christianity is not necessarily part of the "encyclopedia" of the reader (222-224). When individual readers and scholars bring to the secular modern novel an interpretation primarily informed by their Christian faith, such anachronistic interpretations are truer to the actual reader than to the reader (and the meaning) implied by the text. On the other hand, when Christianity is introduced through the use of specifically Christian features, the text indicates that an understanding of

Christianity would be an integral part of the "encyclopedia" of that novel's ideal or implied reader, insofar as it is part of the universe of that novel. It is the presence of these features which should then enable us to distinguish between those works for which an interpretation according to "Christian" norms is indeed a valid one, and those for which such an interpretation is not valid.

Although the modern novel is a secular genre, it is not entirely without "redeeming" qualities which make it well suited to the portrayal of Christian ideas and experience. It is a genre in which religious experience may be examined within the fully complex and problematic context of individual human existence. The modern novel is open to a broad range of techniques and topics, and open-ended in the possibilities of interpretation which it presents to the reader. Thus, in addition to exploring the tension between the world of Christian ideas and the individual religious experience, the novel is able to engage actively the reader in an interpretive experience which may extend the meaning of the text into the life of the reader.

II. MODEL AND TEST CASES

Although the literary context for this model has been my primary concern thus far, the features which characterize the representation of Christianity in the modern novel are determined by the specific religious context of the Christian faith as well as by the nature of the modern novel. First, in order to expand the "encyclopedia" of the text to include this particular set of religious beliefs, the modern novel employs identifiably Christian "typological" effects. These effects are a way of introducing that other, sacred text which is the key text of Christianity. Secondly, the central religious experience of these novels' characters involves the establishment (the struggle to or the failure to establish) of a relationship between an human character and God. As this relationship is frequently described from the first person point of view, I have called this the "I-Thou" feature. Finally, the hermeneutic horizon of the text reaches beyond the individual experience within the text to the experience of the reader. This feature might be called the "Christian prospective" of the text, for it asks the reader to look beyond the experience of reading into the realm of his or her own religious experience, looking forward from the act of reading into the immediate world of the reader's experience as well as into the "other" world of eternal destiny.

A. Typology: The Encoded Con/Text

In earlier centuries Biblical plot events, character names, and Biblical language were often employed in literature to invoke a religious context and interpretation through an hermeneutic short-hand readily understood by readers of the time. The origin of typology as a form of Christian exegesis is a topic for the theologian and the social historian as well as the literary critic; Auerbach has studied the origins of this "figural" mode of thinking in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*. James Kugel, an Old Testament scholar, finds in the poetics of parallelism employed by Old Testament authors the beginnings of what he calls Christian or allegorical exegesis, a hybrid form of Jewish midrash and Greek allegory (135-40). Typological interpretations read the New Testament as the fulfillment of the Old, employing "the midrashic idea of the essential unity of all parts of a divinely inspired text" (139), as well as reading the Bible as an allegory of the eternal.

In an age of plural, post-Christian voices, the novelist who wishes to explore the religious aspects of human experience from a Christian perspective faces a different audience from that of Dante or Milton. While the author of an epic could depend upon a general unity of world view among the readers of his own time, the author of a modern novel can no longer count on a readership with a common theology. Nor does the pluralism of the modern world promote a general understanding of

various specific belief systems such as Christianity; modern pluralism arises instead from a great variety of individually-held world views. Thus, the primary and most necessary means of inviting a reader to understand the novel's religious questions within a Christian context, is the introduction of stylistic or plot elements which are identified with the sacred text and context of Christianity.

As Bakhtin has pointed out, the strength of novelistic prose lies in its presentation of various levels and styles of language. Through typology the language of Christianity becomes one voice among many, but a voice as distinct and discernable as the speech of academia or the accent of the uneducated. Typological elements provide the reader with *a* religious language which brings with it a set of general propositions about the kind of God and the kind of God-man relationship portrayed within the text. The presence of features from the Biblical text introduces a *code* by which the text may be seen to operate and which the reader is invited to adopt; it is the code of a particular religious context. The unique hermeneutic of typology, which posits a mystical relationship between the divinely inspired elements of the text and eternity (or in some cases, between the sacred text and history), is no longer attached to these typological features in the modern context. Yet they are, in the broadest secular sense of intertextual significance, an invitation to read the second, the secular text in terms of the first.

The presence of typological features in novels of Christian experience may be described along a continuum, at one end of which are novels constructed almost entirely from typological features and at the other, novels in which there are few typological features. The limit cases at the positive end of the scale are texts such as those described by Theodore Ziolkowski in his study of *Fictional Transfigurations of Jesus* . From stories in which Jesus miraculously appears - Balzac's *Jésus-Christ en Flandre* or the fifth book of Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* - to novels in which the hero attempts to imitate the life of Christ - *In His Steps* by Charles M. Sheldon or *Robert Elsmere* by Mrs. Humphrey Ward - this type of narrative employs characters and events that are prefigured by the figures and events popularly associated with the life of Jesus.

Used in this way, the typological features of the modern novel may seem to be similar to James Joyce's use of the *Odyssey* as a mythic structure from which to write *Ulysses*. However, at the very least there is a qualitative difference between "myths" which serve no religious function in our society and the characters and events of the sacred text of the dominant religious ideology of Western culture. Northrop Frye has noted some differences between Christian and classical mythologies, and the typological character of Christianity is at the heart of his distinction.

> . . . the typological structure and shape of the Bible make its mythology diachronic, in contrast to the synchronic mythology characteristic of most of the religions outside it. . . . Jesus and Adonis are both 'dying gods,' in the sense of being objects of cults with similar imagery and ritual attached to them; but Jesus is a person and Adonis is not, however many sacrificial victims may have represented him. Some of the stories about Hercules or Theseus or Perseus may have been originally attached to human figures, as were, much earlier, the stories about Gilgamesh. But they tend to lose the sense of historical personality when they become assimilated to a synchronic mythology. (*The Great Code* 84)

In contrast with those texts which clearly employ Biblical characters and events, it is much more difficult to determine the limit cases at the other end of the typological spectrum, where fewer and perhaps more ambiguous typological features are present. Some novels may make very limited or ironic use of Biblical language; others may employ characters and language from the religious institution of the church. The use to which typological features are put in the modern novel ranges from the simply affirmative to the ironic or even parodistic; this spectrum is illustrated even in the variety of titles employed. The title of *Journal d'un curé de campagne* gives us a simple description of the text and encourages the reasonable assumption that some parts of this diary will deal with religious questions. *Les Enfants du sabbat*, *Cold Heaven* and *The Stone Angel* are not only suggestive of the religious elements which their novels contain, but of the potentially problematic nature of the religious ideals they explore. *Les Enfants du*

sabbat makes a more specific acknowledgment of the dark side of its religion in the title of the English translation, *Children of the Black Sabbath* . Other titles - *Le Nœud de vipères* , *The Heart of the Matter* , *The Blue Mountains of China* and *My Lovely Enemy* - contain no typological features, placing the emphasis instead upon other aspects - the confusion, the centrality, the elusiveness or the ambiguity - of the religious questions raised by the novel.

Beyond the title page, a technique obviously suited to highlighting a text or context against which the novel is to be read is the use of a religious epigraph, sometimes taken from scripture, more often a quote from another author. François Mauriac's epigraph to *Le Nœud de vipères* might well summarize the themes of several of the texts within this set: "'Dieu, considérez que nous ne nous entendons pas nous-mêmes et que nous ne savons pas ce que nous voulons, et que nous nous éloignons infiniment de ce que nous désirons.' - Sainte Thérèse d'Avila" (9). In *My Lovely Enemy* the love and death themes of the interwoven stories of James Dyck, university professor, and Indian chief Mas-ke-pe-toon are introduced by Rudy Wiebe with quotes from Knut Rasmussen's *The Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimo* and Teilhard de Chardin's *The Evolution of Chastity* , the former quote describing an Eskimo "theology" of death, the latter a theologian's statement on harnessing "the energies of love for God" (iii). Dylan Thomas's lines "'Do not go gentle into that

good night,/ Rage, rage against the dying of the light'" (i), which preface *The Stone Angel*, are not religious, yet the quotation serves to reinforce the ambiguity of Hagar Shipley's reaction to dying.

For some novels the chapter headings play an important role in pointing to the religious context of the story. Evelyn Waugh's chapter headings in *Brideshead Revisited* provide particularly good examples of typological features. Chapter, or "Book" Three, "A Twitch Upon the Thread," refers back in typological fashion to Cordelia Marchmain's discussion of Catholicism with Charles Ryder. Cordelia was in her turn quoting from one of G. K. Chesterton's "Father Brown" novels: ""Father Brown" said something like "I caught him" (the thief) "with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread"" (253). In a kind of reverse typology, Cordelia claims that God's behaviour towards her family has been like that of Father Brown towards the thief. And, we are to find out in the chapter following, Captain Charles Ryder will also respond to God's twitch upon the thread.

In some of the novels studied the main characters are automatically seen as functioning within a religious context by virtue of some aspect of their situation. This is obviously true for the country priest whose diary Georges Bernanos creates, as for Graham Greene's priest in *The Power and the Glory*. The cast of characters in Wiebe's *Blue Mountains of*

China are members of a particular religious sect - the novel traces individual salvation histories as well as the "salvation" history of a people, weighing the one against the other. Other of Greene's characters clearly belong to a particular branch of Christianity. Their Catholicism introduces the specific activities of attending Mass and going to confession, as well as a vocabulary that is as often drawn from the life of the Church as it is from the Bible.

In "Book One, Part One" of *The Heart of the Matter* , for example, Greene gradually constructs the central dilemna of the book by introducing a vocabulary which increases in typological intensity. The first hint of the religious problem is "the odd premonitory sense of guilt [Scobie] always felt as though he were responsible for something in the future he couldn't even foresee" (17). In his role of police officer Scobie's interview with a complainant is "like a ritual between priest and server" (19). Mass is at first mentioned casually by Scobie's wife (24), and then more pointedly. Asking her husband why he doesn't attend Mass, Louise introduces the question of personal commitment: "'I sometimes think you just became a Catholic to marry me. It doesn't mean a thing to you, does it?'" (25). Still, religious questions remain in the background of everyday life in the face of Scobie's more pressing concern with his unhappy wife and unhappy marriage.

> He could even work better while she talked than when she was silent, for so long as his ear-drum registered those tranquil sounds - the gossip of the club, comments on the sermons preached by Father Rank, the plot of a new novel, even complaints about the weather - he knew that all was well. It was silence that stopped him working - silence in which he might look up and see tears waiting in the eyes for his attention. (26)

It is Catholicism, however, that forms the common ground between Scobie as police officer and a ship's captain whom Scobie discovers to be smuggling an "illegal" letter contrary to wartime regulations. In their common faith the captain sees some hope for compassion:

> He had discovered suddenly how much they had in common: the plaster statues with the swords in the bleeding heart: the whisper behind the confessional curtains: the holy coats and the liquefaction of blood: the dark side chapels and the intricate movements, and somewhere behind it all the love of God. (51)

Thus Scobie's "first crime" (53) against the state that employs him to police and protect, is a crime of compassion. With this act, "it seemed to him he was on the verge of a new life" (53). That new life becomes entangled with Scobie's need to pay for his wife's passage out of West Africa and with his personal need for peace. Louise observes, "if I go away, you'll have your peace," a peace which Scobie thinks of in religious terms: "peace seemed . . . the most beautiful word in the language: My peace I give you, my peace I leave with you: O Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace. In the Mass he pressed his fingers against his eyes to keep the tears of longing in (60).

In the wake of these thoughts on peace "Part One" ends with a dark suggestion of the fatal consequences of Scobie's "terrible private vow" (60) to make his wife happy whatever the cost.

> Despair is the price one pays for setting onself an impossible aim. It is, one is told, the unforgivable sin, but it is a sin the corrupt or evil man never practises. He always has hope. He never reaches the freezing point of knowing absolute failure. Only the man of goodwill carries always in his heart this capacity for damnation. (60)

The vocabulary has shifted from a vague sense of guilt to unforgivable sins and a clear potential for damnation, from casual mention of Masses to Biblical quotations, and thus the set is constructed for the drama of Scobie's personal religious dilemna and the theological context in which it is acted out.

The presence of typological features forms an integral and necessary part of the modern novel of Christian experience. Although this feature is necessary, it is not a sufficient reason in itself to read a text as an exploration of Christian ideas. The presence of Christian imagery or language in a novel is often the basis for the type of "misreading" which I am suggesting takes place when any such sign of Christianity is immediately expanded into a theological interpretation. Typological features may also be used in a purely decorative manner, or as a contrastive foil for psychological or anti-religious themes. Not every character who dies with his arms outstretched or is put on trial is

to be read as a Christ figure, just as thirteen at dinner need not be followed by a crucifixion. It is with the introduction of a second feature, the "I-Thou" relationship, that the typological features become a significant context for the novel's exploration of this aspect of religious experience. In order for this "I-Thou" relationship to develop, a key typological feature must be introduced into the text - the character, God.

B. I-Thou: God, the Character

In the universe of narrative, God is a unique character. When named he is immediately recognized by members of Western cultures as a particular kind of character with a specific set of characteristics. When named in the context provided by the inclusion of Christian typological features in a novel, he takes on an even more explicit identity. In almost every possible sense of Umberto Eco's term, God is a "transworld identity" (230). That is, the character named God has the same identity as, or is assumed to be co-terminous with the "God" of the real world. When the behaviour of God in the novel does not coincide with the behaviour we expect of God, readers are able to recognize that the author has changed some aspect of this character and our interpretation of the work takes this difference into account. In addition, this God is the primary character of numerous other texts, the sacred texts of Christianity, of which he is also an implied author. Perhaps more than

any other character in literature, God is, to use Erich Auerbach's words, "fraught with background" (*Mimesis* 15). Finally, even within the "universe" of the novel the presence of God as a character is a kind of invasion of the natural world by the supernatural.

Further, as an addressee, God is qualitatively different from various other entities that are addressed, for example, in lyric poetry. In *The Pursuit of Signs* Jonathan Culler points out that the use of apostrophic addresses serves to "complicate or disrupt the circuit of communication, raising questions about who is the addressee" (135), and providing answers, Culler argues, that point back toward the poet as both subject and object of his discourse. The apostrophic mode employed in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," is

> . . . the pure embodiment of poetic pretension: of the subject's claim that in his verse he is not merely an empirical poet, . . . but the embodiment of poetic tradition and of the sprit of poesy. . . . Devoid of semantic reference, the *O* of apostrophe refers to other apostrophes and thus to the lineage and conventions of sublime poetry. (143)

Such "empty" forms of address to God may also be found in the novel, but as mimetic reflections of their use in society. "Oh, God!" or "Thank God" are rhetorical devices that are not intended to address God. Perhaps even "emptier" of meaning are the attempts by Beckett's characters to address a God who clearly does not exist in the wasteland of Beckett's novelistic universe. In those instances the form of address is a solipsistic

"me-me," wishful thinking without hope. Quite different, however, is Louis's prayer-like apostrophe in *Le Nœud e vipères* , "O Dieu, Dieu . . . si vous existiez!" (233). The possibility of God's existence in the novelistic universe is at once opened up. The addressee or narratee sought by Louis is this supernatural being who is fraught with the background of Christianity, and this "I-Thou" relationship is eventually established.

The character God suffers most of the disadvantages of the "real-life" God and few of the advantages of other characters in a novel. Readers feel free to continue to believe or disbelieve in his "actual" existence within the universe of the novel, even though we willingly accept the existence of the author's other characters. When Jesus sits down on James Dyck's bed in a room in the Palliser Hotel, Calgary, to discuss with him the nature of love and adulterous relationships, the effect is one of *magical* realism (Wiebe *My Lovely Enemy*, 78-85). After an initial reassurance to himself and the reader - "I am certain, . .. this is no dream I am not sleeping" (78) - James accepts this invasion of the natural world by a character from the supernatural with a matter-of-factness reminiscent of the first line of Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* .

When God is seen to intervene in the plot of a modern novel, the realistic effect of the novel is maintained only if the action is presented with some ambiguity - ambiguity either in the reaction of the character

whom God has addressed, or in the nature of the action which might be perceived as an intervention by God. In Brian Moore's *Cold Heaven* Marie's two-fold response to a vision sent by God is unwilling belief in the reality of her experience but also continued disbelief in God and rejection of Catholicism. Although Marie does not doubt the reality of the vision and its consequences, the response of other characters, including the priests from whom she seeks help, is to suggest a "natural," psychological explanation that her experience is linked with feelings of guilt over her adulterous affair (112-119). But we are prevented along with Marie from reaching such "natural" explanations - too much objective evidence is given that Marie was not hallucinating. Thus the unresolved tension of the novel revolves around Moore's realistic presentation of the supernatural within the natural world. Even when confronted with the "reality" of the supernatural, Marie may choose to maintain her disbelief.

Sarah prays to a God in whom she does not believe in Greene's *The End of the Affair* , but when the "miracle" she asks for seems to take place she finds herself obliged to live up to her end of the bargain struck with God. Yet the reader, and even Sarah, is never quite sure that the "miracle" was anything more than an hysterical reaction to the frightening sight of her lover lying injured, but not dead, beneath the bombed ruins of his house. The more realistic portrayal of modern

religious experience includes this potential for doubting the message; this self-questioning attitude is also one that is a primary characteristic of the novel. The ironic twist in the representations of the supernatural in an otherwise realistic novel is that the "doubt" introduced is not directed at the faith of the believer, but at the non-believer's confidence that such things do not occur.

As with the typological features, the presence of God as a character may be measured along a spectrum which includes at one end those instances mentioned above in which an actual representative of the supernatural enters the plot and at the other end those novels in which God is a being whom one may accept or reject, address or fail to address. He may be "a twitch on the thread" in the lives of human characters, addressed by them through prayer, or he may be rejected by them as insignificant or non-existent. Yet, even the rejection of God occurs only after the possibility of his existence has been introduced through the typological features of the novel.

Those novels which tend to affirm the experience of Christianity are of course those in which characters acknowledge the existence of God. Wiebe's cast of characters in *The Blue Mountains of China* recognize God's claim on their lives in a variety of ways. Through multiple viewpoints and experiences Wiebe develops a dialogue between a "people's" quest for salvation, their sense of having a salvation history,

and the individual quest. Wiebe follows the migration of the Mennonite people from Russia to various points in North and South America, in their search for the freedom to live untouched by the secular world. Frieda Friesen has followed this migration of her people and her voice represents their sense of being called: "But the Lord led me through so many deep ways and of the world I've seen a little, both north and south" (7); "God sent me great temptation and doubt"; "through many prayers . . . and God's grace I found forgiveness of all my sins and came to the true quiet faith"; "it all comes from God, strength and sickness, want and plenty" (46).

Against this background litany of conventional faith Wiebe creates God's radical and jarring "call" for Samuel U. Reimer to leave the material comfort of Canada and preach peace in Vietnam. As in *Cold Heaven* , the failure to respond to this direct communication from God is linked with death: prevented by his church and his government from following this call, Samuel dies. In Wiebe's novel the characters not only respond to God through recurring prayers and hymns, but through individual acts of sacrifice and witness. David Epp gives his life in the vain hope that he might help others escape Russia to the blue mountains of China, and John Reimer, not knowing how "to be useful," finally decides that he should walk the highways of Canada, carrying a large cross (225).

In the "I-Thou" relationship God is a key figure, but of even greater importance for the novel as a genre is the "adventure of interiority; the content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself" (Lukács, 89). The "adventure" of the novel of Christian experience revolves around the question of individual (and in some cases, "corporate") salvation, or eternal destiny. The typological features of the novel often serve to set this personal quest for salvation against a background of the religious institution's official teaching. It is here that the novel develops a tension or dialogue between theological questions and individual experience. Alongside the official church position that a suicide cannot be "saved," *The Heart of the Matter* raises the question of whether or not Scobie's actions were motivated by his love for God. "The Church knows all the rules," says Father Rank," But it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart" (272).

It is the searching of the human heart that provides the central drama of the novel of Christian experience, and the form of narration most suited to this introspection is the voice of the first-person, the "I," in diary, letter or interior monologue form. The re-discovery of the self within a context of the character's concern for his or her eternal destiny is most often the interior adventure of a character who, in old age, is trying to sort out the meaning of his or her past and its significance for the future. This interior struggle to know oneself is also frequently set

against a background of exterior social relations with church, family, lovers and others.

Louis's writing in Mauriac's *Le Nœud de vipères* is at first intended to be a laying bare of his avaricious and vengeful soul to his wife. However, in the process of re-reading his past Louis also comes to a new understanding of himself and the central motivation of his life, which has been the search for love. At first he finds the source of his own faults in his wife's lack of love: "La tare dont tu m'aurais guéri, si tu m'avais aimé, c'était de ne rien mettre au-dessus du gain immédiat" (93). Having recognized that his own heart is caught in "ce nœud de vipères" (163), Louis begins to see that perhaps his "salvation" is to be found in communication with an "other," his wife.

> Pourquoi ne me parles-tu pas? pourquoi ne m'as-tu jamais parlé? Peut-être existe-t-il une parole de toi qui me fendrait le cœur? . . . Si je n'attendais pas ma mort, pour te livrer ces pages? Si je t'adjurais, au nom de ton Dieu, de les lire jusqu'au bout? Si je guettais le moment où tu aurais achevé la lecture? . . . Si je te demandais pardon? Si nous tombions aux genoux l'un de l'autre? (164)

What begins as a letter in the first half of the novel becomes a confession in the second. In the last lines of the "Première Partie" Louis wonders about the power that leads him to continue writing, to "confess" his past: "Quelle force m'entraîne? Une force aveugle? Un amour? Peut-être un amour . . . "(166). In the process of this confession Louis finally admits to his own responsibility in creating himself and

recognizes the only possible source of hope: "J'ai mis soixante ans à composer ce vieillard mourant de haine. Je suis ce que je suis; il faudrait devenir un autre. O Dieu, Dieu . . . si vous existiez!" (233). Louis realizes that his lifelong greed for money was misplaced love - "Je me suis toujours trompé sur l'objet de mes désirs. Nous ne savons pas ce que nous désirons, nous n'aimons pas ce que nous croyons aimer" (259) - and he begins instead to desire communication with God, whom he now recognizes as the source of that love:

> . . . il est vrai que j'ai été un monstre de solitude et d'indifférence; mais il y avait aussi en moi un sentiment, une obscure certitude que cela ne sert à rien de révolutionner la face du monde; il faut atteindre le monde au cœur. Je cherche celui-là seul qui accomplirait cette victoire; et il faudrait que lui-même fût le Cœur des cœurs, le centre brûlant de tout amour. Désir, qui peut-être était déjà prière. (274)

Like Louis, Hagar Shipley, the aging heroine of Laurence's *The Stone Angel* , is also reviewing her past as she faces death in her immediate future. Although throughout most of the novel Hagar's attempts to recall the past and put the present in order are characterized by a confusion of time and place and failure to communicate her true feelings, during the final chapters of the novel she is finally able to speak the words she has been searching for all along. In an old deserted cannery Hagar makes her "confession" to a complete stranger, over a communion of cheap wine and soda crackers. Confusing this stranger for her son, the present for the past when her son was still alive, and the cannery for her home, Hagar at

last apologizes for her harsh actions towards her son; the stranger/son forgives her.

> 'Its's okay,' he says. 'I knew all the time you never meant it. Everything is all right. You try to sleep. Everything's quite okay.'
>
> I sigh, content. He pulls the blanket up around me. I could even beg God's pardon this moment, for thinking ill of Him some time or other. (248)

After this first act of confession and communion, Hagar continues to make her peace with the world around her, and her communication with others takes the form of small yet significant acts of love. When Mr. Troy the church minister invites the dying Hagar to pray with him she, "scarcely listen[ing] to the droning words" (291), asks him to sing instead. Through his act of praise, Hagar learns son.ething about herself:

> . . . the fumbling of his speech is gone. His voice is firm and sure.
>
> *'All people that on earth do dwell,*
> *Sing to the Lord with joyful voice.*
> *Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell;*
> *Come ye before Him and rejoice."*
>
> I would have wished it. . . . I must always, always, have wanted that - simply to rejoice. . . . Every good joy I might have held, in my man or any child of mine or even the plain light of morning, of walking the earth, all were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearances - oh, proper to whom? When did I ever speak the heart's truth? (292)

In a simple act of kindness Hagar manages to serve God "with mirth," as she brings the bedpan to her suffering hospital roommate, an

act which leaves Hagar and her roommate convulsed with laughter (302). Hagar also manages to speak the "heart's truth" to her son Marvin, who waits at her deathbed like "Jacob, gripping with all his strength, and bargaining. *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me* " (304). Tempted to ask instead for his pardon, Hagar realizes that the word he is looking for is one of blessing, the blessing of a mother on her son, and she at last speaks the words that Marvin has waited much of his life to hear: "'You've not been cranky, Marvin. You've been good to me, always. A better son than John.'" (304).

Finally, woven in the cocoon of her hospital bedding and the pain that grips her chest, Hagar prepares herself for death and wonders if perhaps she should at last appeal to God: "It's the done thing. *Our Father* - no. I want no part of that. All I can think is - *Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg* " (307). This final act of communication, this tentative and ambiguous prayer is entirely in character for Hagar, but it is not at all clear whether this prayer is in some way a rejection of God's mercy or a total reliance upon it. Overwhelmed by physical pain, Hagar instead begs the nurse for an injection - "The world is a needle." (307) - and once again her immediate need to assert herself dictates her actions. The ambiguity of her final act of communication with God is, in the modern context and given Hagar's character, perhaps the most believable ending possible. As much

as she was able, Hagar has made her peace with God, and the reader is left with only as much assurance of her eternal destiny as Hagar herself has. The reader must also sort through the possibilities offered in this ambiguous ending to find the truth.

It is the ambiguity with which Hagar makes her final address to God that must continue to haunt the reader who looks for a definitive answer to the question of Hagar's eternal destiny. This type of ambiguity is one of the means by which a novel moves beyond the expression of individual experience to the experience of the reader. The "ideal" reader of *The Stone Angel* is not the one who reaches some closed and final interpretation, but is rather the one who experiences through Hagar's confusion of misplaced memories and misdirected communications the tentative and ambiguous nature of our understanding of ourselves and others. Individual faith is not always reached through dramatic conversion experiences, nor even through the radical re-discovery of self which was Louis's experience; it may also be depicted as a wrestling with God and the ambiguities of communication.

C. Hermeneutic Prospectives: The Encoded Reader

The presence of typological features in the modern novel suggests for the reader a religious context within which to consider the text. These features are taken out of the purely abstract realm of ideas and

placed into the arena of everyday human experience through the interior adventure of an individual character's struggle to establish a relationship with God. The third feature of the modern novels that incorporate religious experiences into the lives of their characters - the hermeneutic prospective - depends upon the presence of the first two features. Through the discovery of a particular code and the example of how to apply that code in an individual instance, the reader's experience of the text becomes an hermeneutic tool which may be applied to religious experience in the reader's own world. It is in this effect that the hermeneutic code is "prospective" - that the instructions on "how to read" are intended not only for the individual text, but for that "other" and future text of personal religious experience.

The Christian epic is written from within a theologically uniform (although not "problem"-free) religious system, and the "missionary tract" approach to the novel offers one clearly correct code of interpretation. The more open-ended style of the modern novel offers a number of codes from which the reader may choose, and even these readings may be ambiguously or tentatively offered. As with the features already described, the hermeneutic prospectives suggested by these novels vary a great deal in strength and style. In *Le Nœud de vipères* , for example, the two letters at the end of the novel provide a very clear distinction between the "good" reader and the "bad." As Gerald

Prince has observed in his study of the shifting narratees of *Le Nœud de vipères* , Louis's journal is in fact a search for the ideal reader.

> Les hésitations de Louis quand à son destinataire illuminent le chemin qui mène à la conclusion du roman: désespérant de trouver un lecteur humain qui le comprenne, Louis finit par se rendre compte qui Dieu seul peut dépasser les apparences et lire en lui la vérité. Mais Dieu lit au-delà d'un texte, Dieu n'a pas besoin de texte. Louis peut s'arrêter d'écrire. Il meurt. Mais c'est pour renaître: il a découvert le lecteur éternel. (72)

However, before Louis finds this perfect reader, "renaître au moment de mourir" as Louis himself writes (262), he must first learn how to be a good reader, how to read or re-read his own past as well as how to read others, including God. Within the first part of the novel Louis frequently arrives at conclusions about Isa's attitudes and feelings, certain of his ability to see through her even though he had been blinded by love at first: "Il y eut pourtant des signes, mais que j'interprétais mal" (49-50). With the birth of their first son Louis claims to discover Isa's true nature: "Dès la naissance d'Hubert, tu trahis ta vraie nature: tu étais mère, tu n'étais que mère. Ton attention se détourna de moi" (77). As for himself, Louis claims "Cette habileté à se duper soi-même, qui aide à vivre la plupart des hommes, m'a toujours fait défaut" (19).

Yet, through the process of writing his confession, Louis is finally undeceived as to his true nature and his ability to read people.

> Je me suis toujours trompé sur l'objet de mes désirs. Nous ne savons pas ce que nous désirons, nous n'aimons pas ce que nous croyons aimer. (259)

> Jamais l'aspect des autres ne s'offrit à moi comme ce qu'il faut crever, comme ce qu'il faut traverser pour les atteindre. (269)

In the end it is Louis who tells his daughter and granddaughter "nous avions eu le tort de juger ce Phili plus vil qu'il n'était" (282), for he has finally learned how to read others correctly. Yet, Mauriac is not quite trustful enough of his own readers, for in addition to the hermeneutic lesson which he supplies in the form of Louis's re-reading of himself, he gives us the example of a "bad" and a "good" reading of Louis's text.

In studying the diary fiction of Bernanos and Mauriac, Abbott has observed that "the reflexivity of these diaries is used continually to open out the paradox that self-perception is self-transformation. For both diarists the moments of becoming are moments of a return to what they have always been" (125). The diarist-priest of *Journal d'un curé de campagne* expresses the wish that his diary might become "une conversation entre le bon Dieu et moi, un prolongement de la prière, une façon de tourner les difficultés de l'oraison, qui me paraissent encore trop souvent insurmontables" (29). In spite of this desire the Curé d'Ambricourt is constantly aware of what he feels are the shortcomings of his diary, which is more often than not filled with everyday concerns related to his poverty and his illness. Yet it is this humble man who constantly doubts his own ability to pray who is able to teach the proud Mme. la Comtesse the simple words and the right attitude with which to

address God:

> 'Que voulez vous que je dise?'
> 'Dites: que votre règne arrive.'
> 'Que votre règne arrive!'
> 'Que votre volonté soit faite.'
> Elle s'est levée brusquement, la main toujours serrée contre sa poitrine.
> 'Voyons,' m'écriai-je, 'c'est une parole que vous avez répétée bien des fois, il faut maintenant la prononcer du fond du cœur.' (210)

Like Louis, who through his own example, helped his granddaughter Janine to understand the significance of her "faith" in God, so the Curé's ability to correctly "read" or understand the Comtesse enables him to teach her how to address God. The Curé, throughout his diary, is well aware of the identity of his ideal reader, but he is obsessed with doubts about his ability to pray, to address God. In his words to the Comtesse he provides the answer to his own dilemna - that God, the ideal reader, reads the heart rather than a text. It is this emphasis on the diary "writer's" concern with reading and being read that extends the meaning of the text to include the interpretive activity of the reader.

Of the three features which characterize the portrayal of Christianity in the modern novel, the prospective appeal to the reader is most open to abuse. An author who is herself or himself committed to a particular set of ideas is often tempted to provide some means of ensuring that the reader does in fact read those ideas in the correct way. In her discussion of *Ideas and the Novel* McCarthy suggests that the

current use of the term "novel of ideas" (18) is limited to those novels in which the characters discuss ideas, presenting various points of view without coming to a clear resolution, or the tract in which a spokesman points out the correct resolution of the discussion (the novels of D.H. Lawrence being an example of the latter type). Wiebe frequently employs the technique of presenting his ideas as a discussion between characters, sometimes to pedantic effect, as in the laboured discussion of the main points of the novel at the end of *The Blue Mountains of China*, or to perhaps inadvertently comic effect, as in the theological discussion during lovemaking in *My Lovely Enemy.*

Although Wiebe's novelistic universes are inhabited by characters who are interested in ideas, the main thrust of the hermeneutic prospective is not so much linked with the content of ideas as it is with method, the way in which we interpret ourselves as individuals against the background of those ideas. Thus, it is in Wiebe's re-creation of history and the interplay of different histories (Indian, Mennonite and Canadian), as well as his re-examination of the implications of theology for human action in both of these novels that we the readers are led to some consideration of the ways in which we structure the world.

Within the modern novel the appeal to the reader to re-read not only the novel but also one's own experience, the appeal to "think again," is made after subtle, often ambiguous changes in the actions or perceptions

of the characters. It may do no more than raise the question of "what does this change mean?" In *The Stone Angel* this moment of re-reading occurs at the end of the novel with a re-wording of the prayer one might expect from a frightened and dying woman. The effect of Hagar's prayer, which is not at all like most prayers, is similar to the heightening effect which Kugel describes in the parallelistic lines of Biblical poetry. It is the difference, the shift from conventional prayer, that makes us aware of the ambiguity and the personality contained in those lines. The ambiguity of Hagar's prayer is an echo of her past history of failed communications; her feelings of love for her husband and sons, and her need to be loved, are never expressed. Even the final series of communications which Hagar enacts are characterized by an ironic indirection. Her "confession" in the cannery brings a word of forgiveness from a total stranger; a hymn of praise is sung *for* her by the minister. Only in her unselfish act of bringing a bedpan to her roommate does Hagar finally manage to match the intention with the deed. If God is to understand Hagar's true feelings behind her ambiguously offered prayer, he must be the kind of reader who is able to understand fully the author's intentions, reading, as Prince says, without a text. At least two interpretations of Hagar's prayer are possible, but it remains for the reader to wonder at the meaning of these things, for Laurence, like many modern authors, refuses to play God or judge.

There are various levels of judgment suggested within novels which explore religious questions. The typological features used may suggest the church's point of view to greater or lesser degrees. The first person narrative or first person point of view offers us the protagonist's own assessment of his or her relationship with God. At some point during the narrative we may also be offered the opinions of other characters with regard to their own "I-Thou" relationship, or that of the protagonist. However, the "ultimate" point of view, the ultimate answer to the question of individual salvation cannot be presented except by an author who presumes to know the mind of God. Yet for readers, fictitious and otherwise, the question of whether or not we have read the text correctly becomes of paramount importance, if the interpretation of that "text" will determine the "reader's" eternal destiny.

CONCLUSIONS

An experimental model lends itself better to the suggestion of further areas for testing and application than it does to *a* conclusion. If this model is a valid description of the features which characterize Christian expression within the novel, then it may be tested and put to use in two ways. First, it may be employed to describe specific aspects of religious experience within the plot of the modern novel. It would be useful, for example, to the student of literature who wishes to examine the role of conversion in the modern novel. The act of religious conversion may be construed as the discovery of an "eternal" narratee to whom all subsequent thoughts and actions are directed. Conversion is a very specific type of religious plot event, and is not necessarily present in all novels of Christian experience. However, the "before" and "after" nature of the conversion experience seems to play a strong role in the structure of several of the novels included in my discussion. *My Lovely Enemy* and *Le Nœud de vipères* are constructed in two distinct parts which represent a marked shift in their characters' perception of religion and related aspects of human experience. This two-part structure, which involves a crossing over to another way of thinking, might well be compared to novels in which the "conversion" experience is inverted (a loss of faith), or where the conversion is not related to

religion. E. M. Forster's *Maurice*, a novel of homosexual experience, is composed of two equal parts with a short bridge-like chapter between them. A comparison of *Maurice* with the novels of Christian experience would need to examine the different models by which each functioned, particularly with regard to the "narratee" sought after, and the appeal made by the novel to the reader, as well as with consideration of a model from which homosexual experience is portrayed.

With this model as a basis for our understanding of religion in literature, comparisons of religion with other themes - physical/spiritual love, classical/Christian contrasts - might be carried out with some clarity as to the nature of religious expression in the novel. The strong similarities between the religious and the romantic "I-Thou" relationship often provide the basis for a novel's exploration of the meaning of love. In many of the novels which I studied for their treatment of religion, the question of romantic love also played a significant role.

The presence of God as a unique type of "transworld identity" suggests further possibilities for the study of character in narrative. He, God, has played three major roles in narrative - that of implied author, character ("real" or implied) and addressee or narratee. The role of God the character in these narrative communication situations is a complex one. It would be interesting to see whether there are other such

multi-purpose entities that function in narrative, or whether the God character is somehow unique. The question of forms of address to hypothetical characters such as the muses also provides an interesting point of departure for extending the model into the realm of poetry. Are the features characteristic of the modern novel's representation of Christianity also necessary and/or present in poetry?

Finally, our awareness of this model as the basis for presenting Christianity within the novel should enable us to make distinctions between those novels which might with some validity be understood to have "Christian" significance and those novels for which a "Christian" reading is not valid. Thus, the model should be useful in understanding the "problem" cases which often seem to invite some sort of Christian interpretation, but which upon closer inspection may be described as either 1) merely decorative in religious content; 2) committed, but not to religion; 3) parodistic or anti-religious in their exploration of religious themes or 4) containing religious themes which are not solely Christian.

In science fiction novels, for example, one could list numerous "Messiah" figures who sacrifice their lives to save mankind, and then through some miracle of technology or evolutionary adaptation, come back to life. The hero of Frank Herbert's *Dune* series, for example, is a saviour of his people who gives his life and returns to life in another form. But Maud'dib's return is a salvation event that is repeated,

therefore "eternal" in the cyclical sense (much like the *Dune* books themselves, which seemed about to extend into endless trilogies). Although the "Messiah" figure may be understood as a typological feature, in the absence of an "I-Thou" relationship, it would be difficult to argue that a science fiction work suggested a Christian reading. Not only science fiction texts, but various kinds of "committed" literature might also make a "prospective" appeal to the reader to adopt a particular political stance, or a specific attitude towards technology, or the ecosystem. Yet, in the absence of typological features or an "I-Thou" relationship, the reader has no cause to look for a religious interpretation of the work.

Les Enfants du sabbat, by Anne Hébert, is an example of the type of work which may be read as a parody of Christianity. In fact, like the Satanic practises which it depicts, this novel contains many inversions of Christian typological features. Within the walls of a convent, Sister Julie's memory-visions of incest and Satanic ritual are all the more powerful for the banal and apparently lifeless Christianity which is practised by the Sisters. As in the novel of confession, the retelling of the past provides the means of tracing the spiritual development of the protagonist. Sister Julie's "I-Thou" relationship with the devil is one which enables her to literally "reproduce" the miracle of an apparently virgin birth. Although Hébert's novel does not make a prospective appeal

for conversion to Satanic beliefs, there is an underlying fascination with the dark and sensual side of spirituality.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* represents a variation of the "I-Thou" relationship which moves beyond the bounds of the Christian faith, as the protagonist herself struggles to move beyond the limits of being poor, black and female. In this epistolary novel, which is dedicated "To the Spirit: Without whose assistance/ Neither this book/ Nor I/ Would have been/ Written" (5), Celie begins telling the story of her life in a series of letters addressed to God, in the hope that "maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me" (11). What is happening to Celie is that her step-father has instructed her, after having raped her, to "*not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy*" (11).

Having lost touch with her sister Nettie, Celie has no one else that she can tell her troubles to but God. When Celie finally receives a series of letters which Nettie had written to her over the years, she writes one last letter to God, but concludes that he "must be asleep" (163). Celie has found a new "narratee," and so her next letters are addressed to Nettie.

Dear Nettie,

> I don't write to God no more, I write to you.
> What happen to God? ast Shug.
> . . .
> What God do for me? I ast.

> She say, Celie! Like she shock. He gave you life, good health, and a good woman that love you to death.
>
> Yeah, I say, and he give me a lynched daddy, a crazy mama, a lowdown dog of a step pa and a sister I probably won't ever see again. Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgitful and lowdown. (175)

Together Nettie and Celie learn to integrate their African and Christian religious inheritance: "God is different to us now, after all these years in Africa," Nettie writes. "More spirit than ever before, and more internal. Most people think he has to look like something or someone - a roofleaf or Christ - but we don't. And not being tied to what God looks like, frees us" (227). When Celie is finally reunited with Nettie, she addresses the last letter of the novel to God, a God who is now a much different idea from her original God - an "I-You (plural)."

> Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God.
>
> Thank you for bringing my sister Nettie and our children home. (249)

In following the process by which Celie comes to re-evaluate not only herself but the world around her, the reader is also invited to re-examine the categories "male/female," "black/white," and "Christian/pagan." Thus, while the typological and hermeneutic features remain relatively unchanged in *The Color Purple* , the "I-Thou" relationship takes on a different form, one which is unlike that of Christianity. In addition to theist/pantheist contrasts, a comparison of the Christian model with those used for the portrayal of closely related religions - Judaism, for

example - would tell us in what ways this model is unique to Christianity and in what ways it is applicable to other religions in literature.

Although my focus has necessarily been upon the literary systems which are the immediate context of the modern novel, the religious systems of church as institution and theology as discipline also play a vital role in shaping the model by which Christianity is represented in literature. These questions lead us back into the realm of interdisciplinary studies in which the common ground between religion and literature becomes the basis of the discussion. Interdisciplinary discussions of this kind might also employ the model that I have developed as a tool for literary studies, in order to examine, for example, the theological paradigm which may be perceived to function behind the modern novelist's use of these features within the genre of the novel. It would be interesting to note whether paradigm shifts in the models employed by Christianity for God/Christ also have an influence in the portrayal of and communication with the God character in the history of literature. Ian Barbour engages in a similar kind of comparative study in *Myths, Models, and Paradigms* , a work which examines the paradigm shifts which occur in science and religion. The models for God and Christian experience might also be fruitfully explored from the feminist perspective on theology put forward by Mary Daly's *Beyond God the*

Father.

This study of the modelling of Christian experience in the novel has considered only a particular genre within a particular period. Thus, it is a synchronic study, and it may well be that the model I have explored is only strong enough for synchronic application, or that it is only useful for the body of test cases which were examined. However, in its use of a self-reflexive structure which invites a particular type of reader-response, as in its use of typological features and "I-Thou" forms of address to God, the modern "Christian" novel appears to be following an established tradition. In an article entitled "The Conscience of Narrative: Toward a Hermeneutics of Transcendence," Cyrus Hamlin describes the strategies of discourse employed in two works of "first-person autobiographical narrative (205)," Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and St. Augustine's *Confessions* . These texts, Hamlin argues, ". . . articulate[ ],

> as a kind of hermeneutical superstructure, a related story of developing awareness or self-consciousness in the narrator as a reflective and retrospective response to his own narrative or life history. The peculiar hermeneutical strategy which I wish to consider here pertains to the need in such narrative to develop in the reader a corresponding awareness or self-consciousness, related to but not identical with that of the narrator, in response to the status and the experience of that self which is constituted by the narrative. (207)

Hamlin's detailed study of the two works is based on Dante's *Divina Commedia* , a prototypical example of a text in which "the act of reading

the poem is . . . identified with the visionary journey of the pilgrim," and in which "the goal of the journey is to achieve and share with the poet-narrator . . . that ultimate vision of divinity which he claims to have enjoyed as a gift of grace" (208).

Hamlin examines the ways in which both Sterne and St. Augustine use scripture and self-consciousness to extend the hermeneutic horizon of their works to the conscience of the reader. Although *Tristram Shandy'* s narrative "conscience" is tied to scripture quoted in one of Yorrick's sermons, there does not appear to be a movement towards some form of "I-Thou" communication within the novel, even though the typological features and the hermeneutic emphasis are present. Imposing a "Christian" interpretation on this novel would do it an injustice. St. Augustine's *Confessions* is, of course, an almost prototypical example of Christian "I-Thou" communication.

Auerbach's description of the style embodied by the ancient Hebrew epics of the Old Testament suggests further possibilities for a comparison between the reading invited by modernist texts and the reading of scripture. The Old Testament style is characterized by:

> . . . certain parts brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, 'background' quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation, universal-historical claims, development of the concept of the historically becoming, and preoccupation with the problematic. (*Mimesis* 23)

This style of mimesis is much closer to the modern novel's preoccupation

with the problems of expressing the multiplicity and mystery of human experience than it is to a unified view of a closed universe.

There is no longer only one unified set of rules to be applied to questions of eternal salvation; neither is there only one set of rules by which to interpret the novel. Lukács observed that "the novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God" (88). In the absence of a unified world view the search for a relationship with God has perhaps necessarily become a highly individual matter; to paraphrase Iser, the burden of interpretation has become greater for both the reader and the individual in search of salvation. Yet, our ability to make the formal distinction between closed/open literary genres, like the contrast between unified/pluralistic theologies, depends upon our "modern" ability to perceive the dialectic nature of language and meaning. Closed literary forms, like closed theological systems, are those which do not engage the full range of possibilities inherent in language - spiritual or literary. Although Christian world views have at different times in history functioned as complete and closed systems, the texts on which they were founded have been open enough to allow for a wide variety of interpretations. It is precisely this open-ended quality that challenges the reader to discover the "background" of the text, those points at which the meaning of an event or a word extends into the world of experience.

This process of extending the "word" into the present is the activity

of what David Tracy calls "the analogical imagination." Tracy's description of the analogical language of systematic theology, "a language of ordered relationships articulating similarity-in-difference" (108), may also be applied to the self-reflexive activity of novelistic characters in search of religious meaning as well as to the authors and readers of those novels:

> . . . analogical language . . . is a second-order reflective language reexpressing the meanings of the originating religious event and its original religious language to and for a reflective mind: a mind searching for some order, yet recognizing, at every moment in its search, the irreducible tension at the heart of its own participatory and distancing experience of the originating event as an event of a disclosure-concealment to focus the entire search; a mind recognizing, therefore, the ultimate incomprehensibility of the event that provides the focal meaning for developing both analogies-in-difference and order from chaos . . . . (409)

This tension between the originating event and the individual search for meaning is at the heart of the modern novel's expression of Christianity.

In an age of plural, post-Christian voices, the novelist who wishes to explore the religious aspects of human experience from a Christian perspective must function within the literary system and the broader cultural context of the time as well as within that particular religious belief system. Thus the form in which Christian ideas and experience are portrayed within the novel is determined by the aesthetic demands of the genre and the culture in which it is read as well as by the belief system of Christianity. The possibility of interpreting a novel within the

context of Christianity is first introduced through the presence of typological features within the novel. When the interior adventure of an individual in search of self-knowledge is linked with the struggle to establish a relationship with God, the self-confession or review of the past leads to an "I-Thou" communication. Within the tension which arises in the dialogue between the background of religious ideas and the individual experience of a relationship with God, the reader is invited, through an awareness of the process of interpretation, to recognize an extra horizon of significance which points to the significance of Christianity for his or her own experience. The presence of these features within the modern novel characterizes the model by which the possibility of Christian commitment is introduced into an otherwise secular genre. And, it is through the application of this model to the modern novel that we might examine the presence of Christian ideas and experiences from a literary perspective.

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APPENDIX A

The following works are the test cases from which the proposed model was developed. Quotations within the thesis are taken from the editions listed in the Bibliography. An "*" indicates those works which do not contain the three features of the Christian novel, but which have been used within the thesis in contrast and comparison with the modern Christian novels.

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